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POLICY ISSUES: COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

# UNEP's effort towards the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa: 1995-1996

## Report of the Executive Director

## Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 35/73 of 5 December 1980 and 39/168 B of 17 December 1984, which requested the Governing Council to report, through the Economic and Social Council, on the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (PACD). It also responds to Governing Council decision 18/26 of 26 May 1995, in which the Council requested the Executive Director to report to the Council at its nineteenth session on the implementation of the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Partnership to Combat Desertification and on the activities undertaken with a view to implementing the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (UNCCD).

The report summarizes the progress achieved in the period 1995-1996 towards the implementation of the UNCCD, including through the Partnership agreement with the UNDP Office to Combat Desertification (UNSO). It also puts forward proposed actions which the Council might wish to consider.

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## Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

1. Express its support for ongoing efforts by the United Nations Environment Programme to support the development of an updated assessment methodology for drylands and desertification, including the development of appropriate indicators, based on improved national approaches involving communities, as well as its efforts in increasing awareness of desertification and in disseminating targeted information materials to a range of media;

2. Encourage the Executive Director to maintain the function of UNEP as a global centre of excellence on desertification control, promoting cooperation and coordination of worldwide efforts to combat desertification and to continue and intensify research and development collaboration with leading world scientific institutions and centres of excellence on desertification and land degradation and drought issues, particularly on the social and economic aspects of these problems, within the limits of available resources as proposed on the 1998-1999 programme of work;

3. Request the Executive Director to participate actively in assisting Governments and non-governmental and community-based organizations to implement the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the resolution on urgent action for Africa adopted by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Convention (INCD) and to support, within the limits of available resources, the interim secretariat of the Convention;

4. Express its support for the proposal made by UNEP to INCD to provide administrative support for the Permanent Secretariat, in accordance with the mandates given it by the General Assembly and Governing Council to support the INCD and the implementation of the UNCCD and assist coordination of convention secretariats in general;

5. Authorize the Executive Director to submit, on behalf of the Council, her report on UNEP's efforts towards the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in 1995 and 1996, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

## I. UNEP'S EFFORT TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

1. The present report is structured according to the four programme foci for desertification control activities approved by the Governing Council at its eighteenth session: the assessment of land degradation; improving global awareness of dryland and desertification issues; promoting action in support of the UNCCD, and improving understanding of the social dimensions of land degradation and promoting sustainable practices of land management. During 1996, progress has been constrained by lack of available resources. Nevertheless, progress has been achieved.

### A. Assessment of land degradation

2. Three regional pilot projects and training centres in Africa, Eastern Europe and West Asia were established for soils and terrain database compilation and the interpretation of land degradation assessment, the risks of soil erosion and food-producing capacities. An assessment of the status of human-induced soil degradation was completed in 15 countries in South and South-East Asia at a scale of 1:5 million. Work on updating of the UNEP database on desertification continued and the material is being prepared for use in the production of a revised World Atlas of Desertification.

3. UNEP, as part of a global initiative, supported activities in eight southern African countries to compile and evaluate soil and water conservation practices and disseminate information on sustainable soil and water conservation systems to countries with similar environments. The Kenya National Land Degradation Assessment and Mapping project, funded by the Government of the Netherlands and hosted by UNEP was completed.

4. UNEP continued to work closely with other organizations, including with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), on enhancing knowledge on soil biodiversity for sustainable tropical agriculture; with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in preparing a policy paper on environment and rural development and with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on guidelines for integrated planning and management of land resources. In addition, UNEP sponsored an expert workshop to assess the prospects of carbon storage in dryland soils and its impact on mitigating climate change. The results have been published.

### B. Awareness-raising

5. During the period under review, major focus was given to planning, contract negotiation and implementation of a project to produce a revised version of the World Atlas of Desertification, based on an updating of the UNEP database on desertification. The Atlas will be published in 1997, in paper and electronic formats.

6. Three issues of the Desertification Control Bulletin were issued, the special issue of Our Planet on desertification was reprinted and a summary pamphlet of its contents was produced. Work was completed on the publications Social Aspects of Sustainable Dryland Management, the Directory of Arid Lands Research Institutions and The Social Dimensions of Desertification: An Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review, and copies of publications and other documents on desertification control were widely disseminated, by post, at major international conferences, INCD sessions and technical meetings.

7. UNEP also used the major international conferences to distribute other material on desertification. In cooperation with Television Trust for the Environment (TVE), two films highlighting the effects on women of desertification were made for the Fourth World Conference on Women, two on rural-urban migration for United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and one on drylands and food security for the World Food Summit.

8. An awareness-raising programme on the drylands targeting younger children, including a jigsaw, quiz and puzzle book, as well as information and display material, was presented at the Eastbourne Children's Conference, which was co-sponsored by UNEP and British Airways.

9. UNEP has entered into partnership with the Government of South Africa and the national non-governmental organization (NGO) focal point on desertification to develop community-based awareness campaigns as part of preparing the national action programme on desertification control. Resources are being sought in the private sector for the campaign.

10. During 1995, UNEP began a new initiative focusing on gender and the environment. In cooperation with the UNEP gender focal point and the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI), a pilot project on gender and desertification was prepared for submission to donors. A desk-study of available studies and literature was completed.

11. As the task manager for reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development on progress in implementing chapter 12 of Agenda 21, UNEP has prepared the new thematic report on desertification for the five years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), for discussion in 1997.

12. Six regional training courses and workshops were organized on the management of dryland natural resources, sustainable food production, monitoring and assessment of desertification, expansion of new technologies and the provision of public information. A total of 232 participants from developing countries received instruction.

### C. Promoting action

13. UNEP participated actively in the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Convention to Combat Desertification. UNEP continued to support the interim secretariat and its regional consultations. Collaboration with and support to NGOs

continued, with participation in the NGO Network on Desertification (RIOD), in village-level projects and for NGO attendance at the INCD sessions. UNEP has also offered to provide administrative support for the permanent secretariat for the Convention.

14. UNEP gave major focus to urgent action for Africa. In cooperation with the various subregional organizations, meetings were held to coordinate activities at subregional level, to launch subregional action-programme preparation and to determine the measures and mechanisms for implementing the Convention at the African level. UNEP assisted the INCD process in Africa working in cooperation with UNDP/UNSO, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), FAO, the Southern Africa Development Conference (SADC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA). UNEP continued to serve as the secretariat for the African Deserts and Arid Lands Committee (ADALCO), and a consultancy study was commissioned to consider how ADALCO could respond more effectively as the urgent action for Africa implementing arm. UNEP also helped launch the newly formed Regional Coordination Unit for Convention implementation in Africa.

15. UNEP also supported regional and subregional actions and networks in other regions: with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), through the Desertification Control Research and Training Network for Asia and the Pacific (DESCONAP); with the Conference of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment (CAMRE) and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in West Asia and within the FAO/UNEP joint desertification programme for the Latin America region. In the latter, advisory services were provided on the follow-up of existing national plans of action to combat desertification (NPACD) in Chile, Mexico and Peru and a regional symposium was held in Argentina for NPACD coordinators. UNEP continued to support Governments in developing and initiating national action programmes in Bolivia, the Republic of Kalmykia (Russian Federation), Turkmenistan and Kazakstan.

16. Under the International Programme for Arid Land Crops (IPALAC), UNEP, with FAO, UNESCO and UNDP, enabled individuals from African countries to travel for training in Israel on dryland germplasm collection and management.

17. UNEP assisted the International Food Policy Research Institute in preparing A 2020 Vision for Food, Agriculture and the Environment and participated with FAO in preparing the background document Food Production and Environment Impact for the World Food Summit.

18. UNEP participated in and supported major international conferences with a view to enhancing information exchange on scientific and technical aspects of dryland degradation and assist in the establishment of worldwide research networks to address knowledge gaps pertinent to desertification and its linkage with other environmental problems.

19. Within the framework of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNEP held a joint workshop between GEF partners and desertification experts to design GEF-eligible land degradation programmes, projects and guidelines for establishing their incremental costs and value for global biodiversity, climate change and international waters.

20. The year 1996 saw the conclusion of a three year-long preparatory process of two multi-line, multi-agency projects for submission to GEF: People, Land Management and Environmental Change (PLEC) and the Desert Margins Initiative (DMI)

### D. Social dimensions

21. UNEP continued its initiatives to document success stories in land management. The Saving the Drylands award was instituted in 1995 and awarded to eight projects. In 1996, projects in India, Sudan and Ethiopia were evaluated and those in India and Sudan were deemed worthy of the award. In addition, a report was prepared analysing the indicators of success and lessons learned from the evaluation of projects for the 1995 awards.

22. A series of reports on social aspects of desertification were released, including those prepared for UNEP by UNRISD on the linkages between dryland degradation and migration, and an annotated bibliography literature review of the social aspects of desertification. UNEP also produced reports on ongoing and recently completed land-management projects including community participation, on gender studies in Pakistan and on replicable innovations in micro-level land-use projects in Kenya.

## II. UNEP-UNDP/UNSO PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES

23. Assessment and awareness-raising were defined as the foci of joint activities under the 1995 UNEP/UNDP Partnership agreement. A joint programme was prepared to develop indicators for monitoring and assessment of desertification at national and local levels; assessment and monitoring of socio-economic impacts of desertification; and capacity-building in data and information management. A review of the desertification indicators proposed under chapter 12 of Agenda 21 was carried out at the request of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

24. Joint programme activities in awareness-raising focused especially on marking the World Day to Combat Desertification in cooperation with the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI). The day was marked in both 1995 and 1996 by workshops exploring the perceptions of young people on the drylands and of other actors on the Convention and national preparatory processes for action programmes on desertification.

25. UNEP, UNDP/UNSO and the interim secretariat of UNCCD have undertaken to draw together a coordinated awareness-raising programme to build on the ongoing programmes of organizations active in desertification control. This programme should forge new partnerships, highlight programme gaps, assist in fund-raising for a major global programme to raise awareness on the drylands, and catalyse resources for desertification control.

26. In addition, joint support to Governments, subregional and regional organizations, especially in Africa has continued to enable them to participate in the INCD process and in formulating national and regional action programmes. Close cooperation with the World Bank led, inter alia, to assistance with the development of the land-degradation component of the Aral Sea Programme and on the Steering Committee of the Middle East Desertification Initiative.

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